

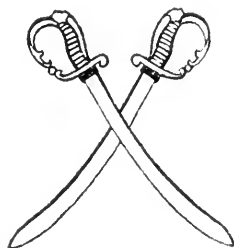
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India and Ireland

By

Eamon De Valera

*President of the Republic of
Ireland*



NEW YORK

Friends of Freedom for India

SEVEN EAST FIFTEENTH STREET

1920



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Twenty-five Cents

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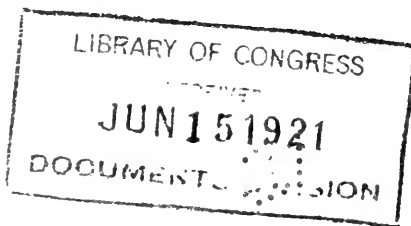
SEVEN EAST FIFTEENTH STREET

1920

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DEDICATED

*To the Memory of the Martyrs Who Gave
Their Lives to Make India and Ireland
Free and Independent*



Gift
Aug 23, 1921

INDIA AND IRELAND

SOME one hundred and forty odd years ago General George Washington sent the following message to the patriots of Ireland: "Patriots of Ireland, your cause is identical with mine." Were George Washington alive now, are we not certain that he would repeat these same words to the patriots of Ireland of this day, and who doubts that he would couple, were he here tonight, the patriots of India with the patriots of Ireland? Is it not directly in accord with Washington's thought then that speaking for the patriots of Ireland I should say here: "Patriots of India, your cause is identical with ours?"

Washington's message united the people of Ireland and the people of

America in a closer bond of sympathy than ever before, a bond which has endured during the years that have intervened since Washington wrote, a bond whose strength is only being fully realized today. I trust this message of mine will unite the people of India and the people of Ireland in a similar union of mutual understanding which will go on strengthening during the years.

That message of Washington has been a constant inspiration to the people of Ireland. It was a message of hope, for Washington's cause had definitely triumphed. It was a message of advice, for he told the secret of success—his secret.

“Champions of Liberty in all lands,” he wrote, “be strong in hope. You are calumniated in your day; I was misrepresented by the loyalists of my day. Had I failed, the scaffold

would have been my doom. But now my enemies pay me honor. Had I failed, I would have deserved the same honor. I stood true to my cause, even when victory had fled. In that I merited success. You must act likewise.”

Patriots of India, I believe that message will be for you the inspiration it has been to us. You must act as we have tried to act—as Washington acted. We must all be true to our cause even when victory has fled, confident that, after our Valley Forge will come surely our Yorktown.

(From a remark of one of the previous speakers it might have been inferred that Ireland was conquered by Britain. No, Ireland was never conquered. No nation, that, like Washington, stands true to its cause under all circumstances, ever is conquered. A nation is conquered only when it abandons its cause, and definitely

gives way to despair. Ireland has never done that and her conduct in the past is a surety that she will never do it. We in Ireland, comparatively small in numbers, close to the seat of Britain's imperial power, have never despaired. You, people of India, remote from her, a continent in yourselves, seventy times as numerous as we are, surely you do not despair—surely you will not despair!

A few years ago a British secretary of state for India in the British House of Commons tried to make light of charges that the British were bleeding India to death. He said that all such statements were mere assertions without any evidence in fact. That remark brought forth a book, "Prosperous British India," by William Digby, of which many of you may know. I was looking through it today. It gives the facts, it shows the British imperial system in

operation, it gives the details, but do we need such a book to know that it is not for the purpose of doing good that the British maintain their rule in India?

Is there any man or woman here tonight or anywhere in the wide world who really believes that it is in order to benefit the people of India that Britain insists on holding India against the Indian people's will? Do you think it is because the British really think they can govern the people of India better than the people of India can govern themselves? Do you think they keep on in India because they want to improve the conditions of the Indians, morally or materially? Do you think it is because they really regard the Indians as a backward people who need their assistance to lead them to the way of prosperity and civilization, that

they persist in remaining there despite the people of India?

Should any person think in this wise and should be inclined to credit British professions of this sort I would ask them what imperial nation yet has shown itself so selfless, so generous, so apostolic, and I would ask them in particular when or where has the British Empire shown such altruism? Where we need facts to convince us is not when the thing is as we would expect it to be, but when things are different from what we would naturally expect them to be.

We do not need books to convince us that the imperial motive is greed. We should need many books to convince us that it is not greed. We do not need books to convince us that no nation has ruled another well. We should rather need books, and many books, to convince us that there ever has been an exception to that rule.

When has it ceased to be, “Woe to those on whose judgment seats the stranger sits—at whose gate the stranger watches?”

Mr. Digby’s book tells us how Britain has drained India of its wealth, of the accumulated capital begot by the toil of centuries, until India today has no capital at all, no resources to enable it to embark on any project of industry, no resources to enable it even to subsist until the harvest of its present labors is come. A wealthy country, poverty-stricken, a frugal people in starvation, deprived by the robber of everything, even the right to live, is the picture he gives. But should we wonder? Do we not know that “the nation that loses its independence loses its revenue?”

Citizens of other countries may be shocked when they learn that 32,000,000 of human beings were

starved to death last year in India. Citizens of the United States, think of it! It is a number such as if almost one in every three of your people were stricken down by the most terrible of deaths, the lingering death from hunger. Think of the agonies of the husbands, the wives and the mothers, the torture of the little ones. It must shock you to realize what that means, you who live in this land of opportunity and plenty. But, terrible as it is, it does not surprise us in Ireland who know what British rule means. It is within the memory of men, living in Ireland when this same British rule struck down in the same manner, not one in every ten as in India, but one in every five, in a land no less fertile than India and people no less active and industrious. And the shooting of an unarmed, a harmless, protesting multitude, and the hangings and the floggings—we have not

to go back far in Irish history to know of these. The British frightfulness of the General Dyers is nothing new to us.

I do not think anyone anywhere needs a book of facts to be convinced that the British have bled India to death, not only in wealth but in actual blood, but if anyone does need such a book it is not an Irishman or one who has read the history of Ireland.

The books tell us that Britain has plundered India. Of course she has plundered India; what else is she in India for? The books only settle the question whether it is a few billions more or less.

The books tell us that almost perpetual famine reigns in India. Of course there is bound to be famine when an alien power's greed takes away all the wealth and all the food that its forces can extract. The figures

in the book only tell us whether the number who die are a few million more or less.

The books give us the instances of the exercise of the brute power of armed force. Do we not know, without the recital of the individual atrocities, that it is only under the influence of a reign of frightfulness and of terror that men with warm blood in their veins would allow the food which is needed for their mothers and wives and children—the food which a bounteous providence has supplied—to be filched away from them by an enemy marauder. There are a thousand native Indians to one foreigner. Isn't it obvious that the Dyers must be there, else the imperial robbery would not be allowed to continue? All the books can tell us is whether the number shot is a few thousand more or less.

And do we need the proof of figures to be certain that the imperial master, fearful that the people will understand, will unite and, acting in concert, will end his tyranny over night, ever does his utmost to keep the people apart, to exterminate them where he can and to plunge them in ignorance where he cannot safely exterminate them?

A British statesman once spoke of the increasing Irish population as a menace to Britain, and in a few years an artificial famine was brought about and they killed off our people by the million. Do we doubt that in full consciousness, they act likewise today in India? The people of India, we are told by the British apologists, are backward and ignorant, lazy and unable to rule themselves. They have made exactly the same pretense about Ireland at other times. The Indians are "mere"

Asiatics, we are told. We were the "mere" Irish. Irishmen, anyhow should not be deceived by the British cant about the Indians.)

All peoples are necessarily backward when you deliberately debar them from progress. They are necessarily ignorant when you shut them out from education and withhold knowledge from them. They are necessarily lazy when you deprive them of the means or the incentive to work. They are necessarily unable to rule themselves when you deprive them of all opportunity for trying. One cannot swim if the water to swim in, or the opportunity to enter it, is denied.

No thinking person should be fooled by pretenses such as these. I hope the Friends of Freedom for India will extract from Mr. Digby's book, and others like it the facts and figures they contain and present them

in a form in which they can be readily grasped by the busy American. But surely no American need wait for these facts to be convinced that the British are in India, not for India's good but to exploit India and the Indians, and that to ensure the continuance of their exploitation the British do not hesitate to resort to any means, no matter how revolting and how cruel, provided these means appear to them the readiest and most effective for their purpose. Dyer had to shoot the people of India else the British Empire could not endure in India. He was nothing but a faithful servant of his imperial masters, and as a faithful, trusty servant they promoted him for his deeds.

It has become a fashion to say that it is only the English ruling classes who are to blame. I am ready to admit that it is they who benefit the most directly by the exploitation, but

the British laboring man is often the loudest in proclaiming the democratic nature of the British system of government. The British laboring man can no longer be excused on the plea of ignorance. The common citizen's vote it is that maintains his government in power; it is in his name that the government acts. He is responsible for the acts of his government if he does not bring that government to book. I hold that the British system being what it is, and the power being in the average voter's hand if he will exercise it, the whole British nation, every part of it, is equally responsible.

(They will pretend to throw up their hands in horror at the deeds of their General Dyers, but, as I have said, the Dyers are the necessary instruments of their imperial system. The government that maintains that system is their government, the res-

ponsibility is their responsibility, and we should not help them to evade the responsibility, and evade the blame. The laboring classes can bring about a change if they want to; if they do not they are guilty with the others, and when representatives of these classes come to their fellow laborers in America we believe the Americans will not be slow to remind them of this fact.

The rule of the people by a foreign despot is a terrible thing, but the rule of a people by a foreign democracy is the worst of all, for it is the most irresponsible of all.

Another frequent pretense is that these questions, like the question of India and the question of Ireland, are in their very nature difficult and "knotty." My friends, you know well there is no peculiar difficulty in them. They are the same simple problems which, as individuals, we

have to face whenever there is a conflict between our consciences directing us to do right and our selfish inclinations inducing us to do what we know is wrong.

There is little difficulty in solving these problems except the difficulty there is in doing what we know to be the right thing when our instincts make us wish to do something different. The British government, the British nation, the British laboring classes, cannot have it both ways any more than the individual can. They, no more than we, can compromise with justice and right.

We must not be satisfied simply with admiring the right and talking about it. We must nerve ourselves to do the right and so must governments, and there is no justification for them if they refuse.

We of Irish blood ought to have no difficulty in seeing through the

pretenses of the British Government when it is unwilling to do right. We ought to have no difficulty in understanding the troubles of the people of India, and they, in their turn, should have no difficulty in understanding those of the people of Ireland. They should find in the story of Ireland's struggle against Britain much also that will be of value to them.

I commend a careful study of that story to our Indian friends here tonight. Conditions in India and Ireland are, no doubt, in many respects dissimilar, as I pointed out at the start. (Ireland is a small nation within easy striking distance of the center of Britain's power; India is, in numbers, a mighty nation and far removed. These different conditions suggest different tactics.)

But there is one lesson that Ireland's struggle teaches very plainly.

It is only through the influence of fear and the pressure of force that Britain has ever been brought to consider even partially the claims of Ireland. We have never been able to achieve anything except when we compelled England to rule us with the naked sword. It is, of course, always by the sword that she has maintained herself in Ireland, as in India, but she prefers to maintain herself with the sword in its scabbard if she can.

The English are very sensitive to what the world thinks of them. They have long played the hypocrite with success; they hate now to see the mask torn from them. Today they are more afraid of it than ever, for their conduct at the Peace Conference has made them suspect to the whole world.

The great moral forces of the world are with India and with Ireland to-

day. We must use them to the full, but we must never forget that we must ultimately rely upon ourselves if we are to be successful. (The policy of Sinn Fein, precisely because it is ultimately this policy of self-reliance, has made Ireland stronger to-day than she has ever been. It must be reliance upon ourselves to endure everything, to brave everything which the advancement of our cause may require.) Men who are ready to face death for what they know to be right cannot be beaten, cannot fail to be victorious. ✓

And here I come to the policy of physical force. Can we, struggling for our freedom, afford to fling away any weapon by which nations in the past have achieved their freedom; any weapon by which, in conceivable circumstances, nations may win their freedom? We in Ireland hold today that we may not. On that account

our opponents call us the physical force party. But we are not a physical force party only. The fact that we are making an appeal to the moral forces of the world is sufficient to show that we do not rely upon the sword as the only weapon.

If those who advocate the use of moral force only assist us now that we appeal to them, there will be no need of any appeal to the other forces. No one appeals to physical force except as a last resort when there is no hope of securing justice otherwise.

But if the world looks on callously, how can the people of India help thinking that it would be a better death for the 32,000,000 of their countrymen and countrywomen to die even on the bayonets of their oppressors than to die passively the lingering death of starvation? We have thought in this way in Ireland of those who died in the Irish famine

when British bayonets were allowed to take away for export the food that our people needed if they were not to die.

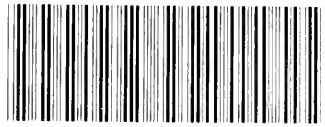
I am sure the people of India cannot help thinking as we thought, and it is not for those who refuse to give the moral assistance within their power to give, to deny them or to deny us the last resort of all, the sword.

If ever the sword was legitimate, it is in a case such as ours. It can only be a question of prudence, when and where and how we should use it. Like Thomas Francis Meagher, we of today in Ireland will not stigmatize the sword, but there is no people upon the whole earth who so desire that a world condition should be brought about in which the sword should become unnecessary as we do.

And if those who decry physical force only make half the effort to

bring it about that we are making, it will speedily come. But until it comes and while endeavoring to bring it about, we of Ireland and you of India must each of us endeavor, both as separate peoples and in combination, to rid ourselves of the vampire that is fattening on our blood, and we must never allow ourselves to forget what weapon it was by which Washington rid his country of this same vampire. Our cause is a common cause. We swear friendship tonight; and we send our common greetings and our pledges to our brothers in Egypt and in Persia, and tell them also that their cause is our cause.—Address delivered at the India Freedom Dinner of the Friends of Freedom for India, on February 28, 1920, at the Central Opera House, New York City.

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